1: Junod M-5 (1895-1909)1927 Thonga



842 The Thonga child is always received into this world with great joy by the whole family. If it is a girl, it means oxen to buy a wife for one of the sons later on ; therefore it means increase not only in the wealth but in the number of the members of the family. If it is a boy, there is no direct material enrichment, but the clan has been strengthened and the name of the father is glorified and perpetuated. In the case of the birth of a first-born child (ñwana wa matibula), a special ceremony is performed at the end of the first week. When the grandmother has smeared the hut, she goes home, summons all the female relatives, sometimes as many as ten or fifteen ; they take with them food, ochre and fat prepared for this purpose. Two or three men accompany them. They enter the village of the child executing a special dance called *khana*, and singing the following song (which is the proper song to glorify a first-born) :

846 533 851 603

I celebrate my pot which has done *ngelebendje*...

They compare the child with a pot of clay which has gone through the firing process. It has been tried as one always tries a pot by letting it fall to the ground ; but it is not shattered, because it has not cracked in the furnace, it has kept intact ! This is what is meant by the descriptive adverb ngelebendje.

846 851 603 Then they smear the baby, the mother, the father, everybody in the village with ochre. It is a great feast. A goat will be killed, if possible, because the father and mother have "found a village" (kuma muti) by the child, they have "grown roots" (mila mitju). This is a law, but its omission is not taboo. When the grandparents do not perform this ceremony, it is an insult to the parents of the child, but no evil consequence will follow.

765 753 851 is a meteorite ground to fine powder. It is interesting to compare this use of the meteorite with the fact that, amongst the Thongas, this fumigation is intended to prevent convulsions. Convulsions, as we shall see (Part VI. Chap. II. B) are caused by the mysterious power of Heaven. The meteorite has fallen from Heaven. Thus the baptism of smoke aims at bringing the child under the influence of the two main elements of Bantu religion : the ancestor gods and Heaven.

846 851 603 For any subsequent children, the feast will be reduced to the presentation by the grandmother of a basket of food to "*tlangela ñwana*," viz. to "celebrate the child."

## III. *The Nursing Period.*

853 The little child has been taken out of the confinement hut (*humesha busahanen*). He is now allowed to go outside. The nursing period then begins and will last two and a half or three years; but before we study the rites which mark it, let us consider the manner in which the baby is carried and his diet during this period.

A South-African woman with her child in the ntehe.

### 1) The Ntehe.

854 A little child is not carried by his mother in her arms, but in a softened skin which is called *ntehe*. The preparation of the ntehe is subject to many prescribed customs.

The first of these is this: the ntehe must not be looked out before the birth of the child, or it would bring misfortune. This is a taboo which I might call a "taboo of prevision." Some other taboos of this kind are met with in our tribe.

[604] For a first-born child, the skin must be provided by the maternal uncle. This is a rule, but the custom is not tabooed (1). The father may also prepare it, if necessary.

825 854 The ntehe must not be a sheep skin. That is taboo. Let them take the skin of a duiker (blue antelope), of a goat or of a mhala (impala). Sheep skins are

(1) Though the term taboo generally means a prohibition, I take the liberty of using it in a positive sense: A custom is taboo or is tabooed when its transgression is a taboo.

l: Junod M-5 (1895-1909)1927 Thonga



862 603 The very day of his weaning, the child must leave the village of his parents and go to stay with his grandparents. A little mat and a few clothes have been prepared for him and the grandmother comes to take him. If he is the first-born, he must go to the parents of the mother ; the second child will be received by the parents of the father. Sometimes father and mother accompany their offspring themselves, during the night, to make the separation easier. It is a sad day for them as well as for the child! The following day the parents go again to see how the little one has stood their absence. They do not enter the village. They remain hidden in the little copse and look at their child through the branches! He must not see his mother, otherwise he would cry... A touching scene indeed!

862 Should the weaned child be obliged to stay with his parents, the mother will smear her breast with Jamaica pepper (biribiri) so that he may lose his taste for the maternal milk as quickly as possible.

862 842 753 The act of weaning is called *lumula*. It comes from the verb *luma* to bite, followed by the reversive suffix *ula* which means to take away, to undo (like *un* in undo). The mother as well as the child are said to have *lumuka* viz. to be in that state when weaning has been accomplished. This word is pronounced with a curious smile, because the act of weaning is in direct relation with the sexual life. As we have seen, sexual intercourse is absolutely prohibited before the tying of the cotton string, viz. for one year after the birth. Afterwards it is allowed, but the mother must not conceive another child before she has weaned the one she is nursing. The law is even more stringent : she must not conceive before her milk has entirely passed away (phya mabelen), after the weaning ceremony, because if she became pregnant, that would "cross the way of the weaned child" (tjemakanya ñwana), cut "his road" (tjemela), "go beforehand" (rangela) ; he would become thin, paralysed, with big holes below the shoulders. He must first be firm (tiyela), then a new pregnancy will not be able to cause him to suffer from dysentery or other ailments!

Often the parents do not observe this very hard law! If they

602 593 their bakokwana are of a much freer, more agreeable and kindlier nature than those with their father's relatives.

Amongst the Thongas of the North the maternal grandfather and the maternal uncles are called indiscriminately kokwana. The Ronga dialect makes a distinction between kokwana, maternal grandfather, and malume, mother's brother; but the malume is often 601 called kokwana. In the Northern clans the *uterine nephews*, viz. the sons of my sister, are always called *ntukulu*, which is the term corresponding to kokwana, as we have seen; amongst the Ba-Ronga, they bear a special name, *mupsyana*, which seems to be becoming obsolete, being often replaced by ntukulu (1).

Let us consider these various relatives on the mother's side. 603 The maternal grandfather is the great, the true kokwana. He is respected for his age. He is however more lenient to his grandson by his daughter than to his grandson by his son. If the first damages anything, he will say: "That is no business of mine. Let the father of the child scold him, as he does harm to his property. I have nothing to do with their affairs. It is not my village." But if it were his grandson by his son, it would be a totally different matter, and he would be hard on him. However, should a child take too great a liberty with his kokwana, the old man will say to him: "Go and play with your malume." 604 The malume, indeed, for his uterine nephew, is quite different from any other relative. No respect at all is necessary towards him! "You go to *bombela* in his village; you do what you please. You take all the food you want without asking permission. If you are ill, he will take special care of you and will sacrifice for you" (Viguet). In the Ronga dialect this bombela is called *nyenyela*. When the mupsyana goes to his maternal uncle, accompanied by his comrades who scent a good meal, the wives of the malume call to him: "Come along, husband (nkata)! Look here, your malume has hidden some food in the back part of the hut (mfungwe), behind the large basket (ngula). Go and take it." The boy steals the food, runs away with it and eats it up to the last morsel

(1) This is one of many proofs that the Ronga clans have preserved some old customs better than their Northern compatriots. Their language also possesses certain archaic features which are wanting in the Northern dialects.

604 very highly respected, that he has the right of life and death over his nephews." The relation between a maternal uncle and his nephews is totally different in that Central African tribe from what it is amongst our South African tribes. There, at any rate, the pattern of behaviour inspired by the mother does not apply to her brother, and Mr. Brown's theory is at fault. On the matriarchy hypothesis, on the contrary, it is not impossible to explain this fact. There has been an evolution (whilst there has probably been no change in the feelings of a mother towards her child from the beginning of the human race up to the present day). If, in the course of this evolution, there was a time when the family system was matrilocal, a time when a child dwelt in its mother's village, close to its mother's brother, one can understand that the latter, at that time, took upon himself the duty of educating the child, of reproving him. His attitude, in such circumstances, was more severe, more dominating than now. As the Ba-Ila have preserved a kind of matriarchy, possessing, as they do, totemic clans in which matriarchal customs prevail, we ought not to be astonished if the relations of uncle and nephew are so different amongst them. In the South African tribes the authority has completely passed to the father. Hence the great respect shown to him by the children ; hence also the want of respect and the great ease in the relations with the maternal uncle.

603 611 At the end of this argument, may I allow a Native to give his opinion ? Natives often refuse if asked to explain these mysterious customs of theirs. Yet when we have the chance of hearing an intelligent Bantu formulate a reason for one of them, we are bound to consider such testimony as very valuable. Natives feel what we, Europeans, can only guess, and they have actual experience of the Bantu kraal life... Speaking on this very subject of the mode of behaviour of a Thonga toward his father's and mother's family my informant said : "If the paternal grandfather is less lenient with his grandson than the maternal grandfather, it is on account of property" (p. 237). The paternal grandfather and his grandson belong to the same clan, or sib, or family. They bear the same name (shibongo). They possess in common certain property, oxen, implements, etc, which all of them have the duty of preserving, increasing, defending. If a child spoils or destroys this property, he commits a wrong which is resented by all the other members of the clan. His paternal grandfather will reprove him. He will do so also if the honour, the good reputation of the clan is at stake. But the maternal grandfather has nothing to do with such matters. The spoiled property

603/611 does not belong to him, and, whatever the child may do in this respect, the ease and indulgence which characterises his relations with his nephew will not be altered. Thus whatever influence the natural feelings of tenderness of the mother towards her children may have had on the special mode of behaviour of the batukulu towards their bakokwana, they are not the only factor, nor perhaps the most important factor to be considered: Property plays a greater part in the determination of that kind of relationship in the present circumstances, and as regards its first origin, the matriarchy hypothesis goes a long way to explain its characteristics.

602/611/178 But let me frankly recognise that the matriarchy theory is but a hypothesis. As Mr. Brown rightly shows, there is not a tribe amongst the Bantus, as far as we know, where that family system exists in its integrity, i. e. matrilineal, matrilocal, matripotestal. Everywhere there seems to prevail a mixture of the two systems. However if there has been an evolution (and an evolution has certainly taken place) and if one system preceded the other, it must certainly have been matriarchy, as its traces, in the present patriarchal system, bear all the character of relics of a former period.

000 I have tried to look far back into the past of the Thonga family system. Now I would ask: What about its future ? The question must be asked, because we are not considering the South African tribe only as a subject of scientific study. We are deeply interested in its welfare and in its destiny. New forces have appeared which act in a new way on primitive society.

What will be, what must be the nature of the evolution ? How must it be directed by those who have a responsibility for the shaping of the future Bantu society ?

We shall answer this question in our Practical Conclusions, at the end of this Volume. For the present we shall be satisfied with a scientific collection of the facts in relation to the two great customs which lie at the base of the whole family system of the Bantus : Lobola and Polygamy.

643 588 595 some woman may come and live with him (titlhuba), as in cases of elopement — in which case he must go, according to the law, early in the morning to the parents of the girl and denounce himself as the abductor (p. 119); but none of these women can be his official wife; they may bear him children, but these will be *makohlwa*, those who have no right to royalty; the young chief may not wed his official wife, she who is to become the mother of the heir to the throne, until after the death of his father.

643 603 595 There is a saying, a precept of the royal code as follows: "Hosi a yi faneli ku bona ntukulu," a chief must never see his grandson, i. e. the one who will eventually succeed his son in the royal line. The Ba-Ngoni of Gungunyana (in Gaza) have the same custom; but with them things are arranged differently. The eldest son of the chief's principal wife, when at the requisite age for marriage, takes a wife and loses the right of succession; it is the youngest son, still young at the time of his father's death, who inherits the throne, because he has no children of his own. This leads to jealousy and civil war between brothers; it has brought numberless misfortunes to the royal family of Gaza, and it was one of the causes of the downfall of Gungunyana. The Thonga custom is much more simple and less dangerous to the maintenance of peace; the chief must not see his grandson, therefore his son will not be officially married until after his father's death. Any wives he may previously have taken will be morganatic and their children are not entitled to inherit.

I have been told by Mankhelu that when a chief lives to be very old and does not wish to delay the marriage of his son and heir, he can himself pay the lobolo and acquire, for his son, the official wife who will be considered as being "the wife of the country." But this seems to be an exceptional occurrence.

## B. CORONATION OF THE CHIEF.

643 766 In all Thonga clans the death of a chief is kept secret for one year or more, as we shall see. Amongst the Nkunas the official mourning for the deceased takes place the same day as the coron-